Quality Assurance Code of Practice

External Examining (Taught Provision)

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 This QA statement sets out the principles and processes underpinning external examining of taught provision at the University of Bath.

1.2 This QA statement should be read in conjunction with:

- Ordinance 15 on Examiners and Examinations
- Regulation 15 on Assessment of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes

either

- The New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations: for students on relevant programmes (as defined in Regulation 15.1 (c)-(g)

or

- QA35 Assessment Procedures, for students on programmes not currently managed by the New Framework for Assessment:

- QA53 Examination and Assessment Offences.

1.3 This QA statement relates to all taught units and programmes of study leading to an award of the University. The details of procedures described in this statement may be varied under the terms of an Institutional Agreement where a programme of study is delivered as a collaborative arrangement with another institution. However, where the University is the awarding body, the appointment and functions of the External Examiner remain the University’s responsibility.

1.4 For principles and processes relating to external examining of the research elements of research degrees including professional doctorates, refer to QA7, Research Degrees.

2. Principles

2.1 The University attaches great importance to peer review from External Examiners as a key means of ensuring that:

- the academic standards of University awards and their component parts are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against this;
- the final assessment process accurately measures student achievement against intended learning outcomes, and is rigorous, fair and fairly operated, and in line with University Regulations and policies;
- the University is able to compare the standard of its awards with those of other higher education institutions;
• the University’s provision is continuously enhanced to reflect developments in the sector, institution and discipline.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Vice-Chancellor is the University officer to whom the External Examiner formally submits his/her report.

3.2 The responsibilities of individual External Examiners (set out in detail in sections 6-8) relate to their role to act as independent and impartial advisers providing informed comment on the academic standards set, and student achievement in relation to those standards. The references made throughout this statement to External Examiners should also be applied to External Advisers for Foundation Year programmes.

3.3 The Vice Chancellor, acting on behalf of Council, determines the remuneration of External Examiners. Where the remuneration is paid to the External Examiner as a form of employment through the payroll, the External Examiner will need to provide the University with documentation of their right to work in the UK in line with UK Visa & Immigration Service (UKVI) requirements prior to any payment being made through the payroll.

3.4 Heads of Department/the LPO/the appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management are responsible for nominating External Examiners for approval, for briefing External Examiners to undertake their roles and for responding to the issues raised in External Examiners’ reports. Heads of Department/the LPO/the appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management may delegate responsibility for some of these tasks, such as provision of programme information and induction, to the Director of Studies, but overall responsibility for ensuring that this provision is in place remains with the Head of Department/the LPO/the appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management.

3.5 On behalf of Senate, Boards of Studies are responsible for scrutinising and approving nominations for the appointment of External Examiners.

3.6 Faculty/School-level Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees are responsible for monitoring of External Examiners’ reports, departmental responses and action taken, as a part of the Annual Monitoring of units and programmes (see QA51).

3.7 University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee is responsible for taking an institutional overview of issues raised by External Examiners, and recommending appropriate action.

3.8 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office is responsible for institutional co-ordination of the receipt and recording of External Examiners’ reports and for maintaining an accurate register of External Examiners.

3.9 The Registry, together with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, is responsible for supporting Departments, the School and the LPO in briefing and inducting External Examiners.

4. Criteria for the Appointment of External Examiners

4.1 Ordinance 15.1 establishes the requirement for External Examiners:

Examinations for a Degree, Diploma or Certificate of the University, whether taken at one time or in sections, shall be the responsibility of a Board of Examiners.
The Board of Examiners shall comprise the internal and external examiners appointed for each of the subjects or groups of subjects included in the scope of the examination. In every subject or group of subjects in all final assessments (as defined by Regulation 15), there shall be at least two examiners, one at least of whom shall not be a member of the Academic Staff of the University.

Accordingly, at least one External Examiner will be appointed for each programme of study, or group of closely related programmes of study.

4.2 An External Examiner shall:
- have knowledge and understanding of the UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
- have competence and experience in the field covered by the programme;
- have academic qualifications/professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined;
- have experience of setting examinations and running assessment procedures (either externally or internally);
- have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of peers;
- have familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in the programme to be examined;
- have fluency in English;
- have met the criteria set out by relevant professional and accrediting bodies;
- have awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of the flexible curriculum;
- have expertise in the enhancement of the student learning experience.

4.3 An External Examiner will normally be expected to have had some prior experience of external examining. Where this is not the case, the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is responsible for ensuring that a programme of induction and briefing is put in place to support the appointee in her/his new role. Whenever possible, a first-time External Examiner should be appointed as part of a team and mentored by an experienced External Examiner who meets the criteria set out in paragraphs 4.2 -4.6.

4.4 External Examiners from outside the UK Higher Education system, for example from industry, are appropriate in certain circumstances. Key selection criteria will be the relevance of their expertise and recent experience of standards in UK higher education.

4.5 It is the responsibility of the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management to ensure that a sufficient number of External Examiners are appointed with adequate expertise to cover all major areas of the programme and the quantity of material being assessed. The Head of Department/ LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management should seek to phase External Examiner appointments to ensure an element of continuity.

4.6 To avoid conflicts of interest and for the assurance of independence, an External Examiner will not be appointed if they are covered by the following categories:
   a. an employee of the University of Bath;
   b. a member of University Court or Council or the equivalent bodies of partner organisations;
c. any former students or staff of the University unless a period of at least five years has elapsed since leaving the University and all students taught by or with the external have completed their programmes;
d. a near relative of a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study;
e. anyone closely associated with the sponsorship of students on the programme;
f. anyone closely associated with placements or training arrangements for the programme;
g. anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study;
h. anyone in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study;
i. anyone involved in recent or current substantial collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved with the programme of study including its assessment processes;
j. anyone who has been directly involved as an external reviewer for a new programme or as the external panel member for Degree Scheme Review
k. anyone whose appointment would lead to a reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes of another institution;
l. anyone replacing an external examiner who is a colleague from the same Department in the same institution;
m. anyone from Departments in partner institutions which contribute to the programme being examined;
n. anyone from the same Department in an external institution where there is already an external examiner appointed to the same Bath programme or group of programmes;

4.7 Anyone who already has a significant commitment during key assessment periods and is therefore unlikely to be able to attend in person for Examiners’ meetings and events, and give due attention in completing the appraisal of scripts, should not be appointed as an external examiner.

4.8 External examiners should not normally hold more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes and units at any one time. Nominees should accordingly give an undertaking in the paperwork to be submitted to the Board of Studies that they will not hold more than one other external examiner appointment at any point during the term of their appointment for the particular programme/group of units for which they are being currently considered.

4.9 Appointment of retired academics is permissible within a maximum of three years after the date of retirement. Sufficient evidence should be provided of continuing involvement in the academic area in question.

| Exceptionally, applications for exemption from the appointment criteria set out above may be made to the University, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee providing a sound rationale. In all such cases advice should be sought from the Assistant Registrar and the Quality Enhancement Officer, Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office. |

4.10 For the purposes of avoiding reciprocal arrangements the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office will hold a register of staff commitments to external examining which will be updated on an annual basis.
5. Appointment and Induction of External Examiners

5.1 The Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is responsible for nominating appropriately qualified individuals to act as External Examiners for approval by the Board of Studies. Nominations for External Examiners with a period of office commencing at the beginning of a new academic session should be submitted to the Board of Studies no later than the final meeting of the previous session. Nominations should be submitted using QA12 form 1.

5.2 In scrutinising nominations for appointment, the Board of Studies will ensure that:
- any individual recommended as an External Examiner has an appropriate level of academic, and where appropriate, professional knowledge, seniority and experience (see 4.2 and 4.4 above);
- where the nominee is new to external examining, or is from outside the UK Higher Education sector, sufficient induction and briefing has been put in place to enable the nominee to fulfil his/her role (see 4.3 above);
- the nominee has no existing, or prior, connection with the University that would call into question his/her ability to exercise objective, impartial and independent judgements (see 4.6 above).

5.3 The Board of Studies will approve the appointment or extension of appointment of an External Examiner on the basis of documentary evidence which demonstrates that the nominee has met all the criteria outlined above in Section 4. The minutes of the Board of Studies will record the qualifications and current employment of the proposed External Examiner, the programmes or parts of programmes to which the External Examiner is appointed and any discussion of appointment criteria in relation to potential conflicts of interest. Senate will then formally note the appointment as recorded in the minutes. Appointments made by Chair’s action should be kept to a minimum.

5.4 The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee will receive an annual report on the appointment of external examiners. The report will include details of all new appointments and extensions of appointment, plus a more detailed account of the scrutiny of a small cross-Faculty/School sample of nominations, to demonstrate how the principles of integrity and objectivity with regard to appointments, which are encapsulated in this statement, are being observed. The report will be prepared by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Office on the basis of reports from Faculties/the School.

5.5 External Examiners are appointed for three years in the first instance, with a possible extension for a maximum of one further year (Ordinance 15.2). Upon expiry of this period, External Examiners for taught programmes may not be reappointed for five years. An appointment may be terminated with six months’ notice by either party. The University reserves the right to terminate the contract if, in the opinion of Senate, the External Examiner fails to fulfil their obligations at the end of any single year of appointment. Such obligations include performance which, in the context of the University's stated expectations, is judged to be inadequate.

5.6 The Secretary to the Board of Studies will advise the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office of External Examiner appointments and extensions of appointment. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office is responsible for maintaining an accurate register of External Examiners on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor.

5.7 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office will issue a letter of appointment to the External Examiner together with:
• QA12 External Examining (Taught Provision);
• the Handbook for External Examiners of Taught Programmes, which includes the Report Form and links to other relevant QA Statements on Assessment (excluding QA35 where the programmes concerned fall under the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations;
• a list of links to
  o University Regulations (including the supplement, New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations);
  o the Single Equality Scheme;
  o the University position on Data Protection.

A copy of the appointment letter will be sent to the Head of Department/School/LPO and the designated Department/School/LPO Administrator.

5.8 Following appointment, the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management will ensure that the following information is provided to the External Examiner in a timely manner:
• a departmental/School contact;
• the composition and membership of the Board of Examiners including the names and subject areas of other External Examiners;
• the schedule for examining procedures including the proposed dates of the Boards of Examiners for Units and Boards of Examiners for Programmes;
• the final report(s) of the outgoing External Examiner(s).

5.9 The Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is also responsible for ensuring that External Examiners receive appropriate induction and briefing material to enable them to appreciate the aims and philosophy of the provision with which they will be associated, and to contribute in an effective manner to the assessment process. This will include provision of relevant information on the scheme of study and assessment for the programme(s)/unit(s) for which the External Examiner has responsibility, such as:
• the student handbook for the programme;
• the programme specification and/or unit descriptions;
• programme assessment regulations;
• (where relevant) the Department/School policy on confidentiality relating to matters of commercial sensitivity (which may arise in relation to assessment of placement and work-based learning);
and on
• the method and extent of sampling;
• whether or not the External Examiner will meet students;
• the way in which access will be provided to assessed parts of the programme (e.g. where the final assessment involves placements or on-line learning).

Where academic standards have been defined explicitly, these should also be made clear to External Examiners.

5.10 To support the induction provided by the Department, information and guidance for external examiners is provided via dedicated web pages: http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/external-examiners/index.html.
5.11 Departments/the School/LPO are strongly encouraged to provide External Examiners with an opportunity to visit the Department/School and the relevant collaborative partner organisation(s) to familiarise themselves with the programme, the institution and its procedures, before the assessment period.

**Good Practice:**
Some Departments invite External Examiners to undertake mid-year visits, offering them the opportunity to meet students as well as visit the Department.

One Department asks a small group of students to take the external examiner for lunch or an evening meal, to provide an opportunity to discuss their experience on the programme (no staff present, expenses paid).

5.12 The Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are informed of any changes affecting their roles and responsibilities.

6. The Role of External Examiners in Assessment

6.1 One of the core roles of the External Examiner is to assure the quality of final assessment processes and ensure that academic standards of awards are set and maintained at the appropriate level. Final assessments are defined in University Regulations as those assessments the results of which count in determining the award or the level of the final award (Degree, Diploma or Certificate of the University). The External Examiner should be an independent and impartial adviser who provides informed comment upon the academic standards set and the students’ achievement in response. The role of the External Examiner is to verify the assessment process and assure overall standards rather than to seek to judge individual cases. In support of these general principles, the External Examiner is involved in:

- assuring the quality and validity of assessments at the design stage, including the quality of assessment criteria and the approval of questions;
- assuring the quality of the marking and grading processes, including the quality of marking, moderation/double marking, scaling, etc;
- assuring the correct application of relevant assessment regulations;
- assuring the fairness of examining, and examination board processes;
- ensuring the consistent use of marking boundaries for units and helping Departments/the School to calibrate their marking;
- verifying that the standards achieved by students are appropriate to the level of study;
- confirming that the academic standards sought and achieved are comparable with other universities in the United Kingdom.

6.2 In discharging their role, External Examiners are expected to take into account the University's policy and regulatory framework as outlined in Section 1 and the University’s Policy on Equal Opportunities for Students as well as nationally recognised guidelines, e.g. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), Subject Benchmark Statements, and the expectations of professional accrediting bodies.

6.3 In accordance with Ordinance 15 and Regulation 15, the University will not make an award without participation in the examining process by at least one Examiner external to the University, who is a full member of the relevant Board of Examiners for Programmes. An External Examiner will be involved in agreeing the marks for any final assessment and in
reaching all decisions relating to the conferment of awards and the determination of final degree classification.

External Examiners are therefore expected to attend meetings of the Boards of Examiners for Units and the Boards of Examiners for Programmes as appropriate.

6.4 A Board of Examiners makes collective decisions with all members being full and equal, and no one member having primacy.

6.5 All draft examination papers, the assessment of which contributes to a final award of the University, and other summative assessment tasks that make a significant contribution\(^1\) to a final award, should be sent, with clear marking criteria and model answers/marking schemes appropriate to the discipline, to an External Examiner for moderation and advice following the internal moderation procedure.

6.6 Procedures for moderation are open to audit by External Examiners who may advise on the appropriateness of the mechanisms for moderating the summative assessments set (see QA16 Assessment, Marking and Feedback).

6.7 An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts and any assignments contributing to the assessment of the final award. In cases where it is agreed that only a selection of scripts shall be inspected, the principles for such selection must be agreed in advance and must normally include those around classification borderlines (on the understanding that borderline candidates should be considered collectively rather than as individual cases). Where a selection has been agreed, External Examiners may wish to see a representative sample from the top, middle and bottom of the range, and all failures. The guiding principle is that External Examiners should have seen sufficient assessments to assure themselves that internal marking and the resultant classification of awards are of an appropriate and consistent standard.

6.8 External examiners are informed of regulations and procedures relating to individual mitigating circumstances and assessment offences in the Handbook for External Examiners and as members of the Board of Examiners are made aware of decisions which affect unit outcomes, progression and awards.

6.9 External Examiners should sign the record of the decisions taken by the Board of Examiners for Programmes which will then be recommended to the Board of Studies in making the award on behalf of Senate.

6.10 If, after thorough and careful discussion, an external examiner should feel unable to endorse the conduct of the assessment process and/or to participate in a collective decision of the Board of Examiners, a full report should be made to the Board of Studies in the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

6.11 Where the Board of Examiners and Board of Studies are involved in the assessment of multi-disciplinary degrees and joint programmes, arrangements for the appropriate External Examiner(s) to be involved in the assessment process should be made by the responsible Board of Studies (as agreed with the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee).

\(^1\) The definition of 'significant contribution' is all work contributing 7% or more towards the degree classification.
7. **The Role of External Examiners in Quality Enhancement**

7.1 A key aspect of the role of External Examiners is to contribute to the ongoing enhancement of the University's provision.

7.2 External Examiners are encouraged to comment on the scheme of assessment and the procedures surrounding moderation, assessment and marking; and to offer advice on the content, balance and structure of the assessment strategies employed.

7.3 Departments/the School are expected to use the opportunity afforded by the visits of External Examiners to discuss with them the structure of the programme(s) of study and the curriculum.

7.4 Reports from External Examiners are used to inform the Annual Monitoring of units and programmes (see QA51). Reports and comments from External Examiners also form part of the evidence base for periodic review of programmes, Degree Scheme Review (see QA13). It is also expected that Departments/the School/LPO will invite comment from External Examiners when proposing amendments to programmes of study affecting the nature and pattern of assessment (see QA4).

**Good Practice Example:**
One Department invites its retiring External Examiners to give lectures on their specialisms to final year students.

8. **External Examiners’ Annual Reports**

8.1 External Examiners are required to provide an annual report on the programme(s) or unit(s) for which they are appointed, including observations on academic standards, aspects of good practice, learning and teaching, programme structure and content. External Examiners are also expected to make further comments at the end of their period of office; a report which is then made available to the incoming External Examiner.

**Good Practice Example:**
One Department offers its External Examiners the opportunity to meet privately outside the Board of Examiners to give them the opportunity to discuss their impressions prior to reporting.

8.2 Where a programme is delivered via a number of modes or partners, this should be reflected in the External Examiner’s report, either by the submission of separate reports, or by clear differentiation of comments on each mode or partner within the body of a single report.

8.3 The University’s approach to quality management is underpinned by the principles of peer review and the informed student voice. It is recognised that the External Examiner system depends on a degree of confidentiality to ensure feedback is frank, whilst providing student representatives with sufficient contextualised information about the quality and standards of their programme. With these twin purposes in mind, the External Examiner’s report form (QA12 form 2) is in two parts:
a. Part 1 will be shared by staff with student representatives via Staff Student Liaison Committees and with all students via a dedicated web page to which they have access. It is expected that the majority of the External Examiners’ comments will be provided within Part 1 of the form. **External Examiners should NOT include any data relating to individual students in Part 1;**

b. Part 2 of the report form is provided for instances where an External Examiner thinks it necessary to:
   - make comments relating to an individual student or member of staff (which would be covered by the Data Protection Act); and/or;
   - make comments on an issue which might be regarded as sensitive or of particular importance, where the External Examiner does not deem broader circulation to be appropriate. These might include categories that the University has defined as restricted under the Freedom of Information Act, such as information that might prejudice the University’s commercial interests, information held under obligation of confidentiality or information that is intended for publication at a later date.

Part 2 of the report form will not be shared with student representatives as a matter of course. However, External Examiners should be aware that the University may be obliged to disclose the contents in response to a specific request under the Data Protection Act or Freedom of Information Act. The University will consider such requests on a case by case basis and will endeavour to consult with the External Examiner prior to disclosure. Further information regarding the University’s policies on Data Protection and Freedom of Information is available at:

http://www.bath.ac.uk/foi/index.html
http://www.bath.ac.uk/internal/data-protection/.

8.4 **External Examiners’ annual reports should be submitted to the Vice-Chancellor within six weeks of the completion of the examination process.** Where possible they should be submitted electronically to: externalexaminers@lists.bath.ac.uk. Alternatively, they can be sent by post to: Professor Dame Glynis Breakwell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath, BA2 7AY.

8.5 Once the report has been received, the designated Department/School/LPO administrator may then proceed with the payment of the External Examiner’s fees.

8.6 In liaison with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, the Secretary to the Board of Studies will check for receipt/non-receipt of reports and request that the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management send a formal written request by letter where reports are missing. Where a report is still not forthcoming, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office will send a further institutional reminder on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor.

9. **Responding to External Examiners’ Annual Reports**

9.1 External Examiners can expect consideration to be given to any concerns that they raise and can expect to have the nature of any resultant action or rationale for lack of action communicated to them.

9.2 On behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office will disseminate reports to:
• the Chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee;
• the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Head of LPO);
• the relevant Associate Dean;
• the Head of Department (for Faculties only);
• the Director of Studies;
• the designated administrator;
• the Head, Student Learning Experience and Quality, in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office.

9.3 External Examiners’ reports are considered at a number of levels within the institution in order to ensure that action is taken at a level appropriate for the issue/concern raised:
• the Vice-Chancellor or the Chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, advised by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, may take up specific points with an External Examiner and require action by the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management, or raise broader themes via the appropriate institutional committee;
• the Dean or an Associate Dean of Faculty/School may take up specific points with relevant colleagues and may disseminate good practice, or address poor practice, through the Board of Studies;
• Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is responsible for ensuring that any matters of concern raised in External Examiners’ reports are addressed at programme level, by raising specific points with the academic staff responsible for the delivery of the programme of study. Where the requirements of external professional bodies are the focus of comments, the Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is also responsible for informing those bodies of action taken in response to the External Examiner’s reports.

9.4 The Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management is responsible for ensuring that Part 1 of an External Examiner’s report is shared with student representatives via Staff/Student Liaison Committees together with the draft response from the Department/School/LPO and any other contextual information on actions taken or planned in response. The reports and responses are also shared via a dedicated web page to which students have access. The personal address of the External Examiner and Part 2 of the report should be removed prior to circulation. Where proceedings of Staff/Student Liaison Committees are published online, steps must be taken to ensure that web pages are accessible to members of the University only.

9.5 The Head of Department/LPO/appropriate Associate Dean in the School of Management should respond to the External Examiner in writing, normally within six weeks of receipt of the report and should copy this to the Dean and Associate Dean (where applicable), Chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Quality Enhancement Officer (Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office).

10. Monitoring and Review

10.1 The Faculty-level Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees monitor External Examiners’ reports, formal responses and reports of action taken, as part of the Annual Monitoring of units and programmes (see QA51). They are also responsible for ensuring that any good practice is disseminated within the Faculty/School.
10.2 SSLCs discuss external examiners’ reports and their responses alongside programme annual monitoring reports. The effectiveness of this discussion is considered as part of the SSLC annual reports.

10.3 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office supports the Chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee in preparing an annual overview of the recurring themes, institutional level issues and good practice identified by External Examiners, for consideration by the Committee. Any recommendations requiring institutional authority will be forwarded to Senate for approval.
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<th>Statement Details</th>
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<td>Individual Mitigating Circumstances &amp; Assessment (IMCA)</td>
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<td>9 June 2010, Minute 131418</td>
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<td>8 June 2011, Minute 13331</td>
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<td><strong>Related Documentation:</strong></td>
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<td>QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education</td>
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<td>University Regulations for Students, especially Regulation 15. See:</td>
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<td>New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations (NFAAR) (see</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Mitigating Circumstances &amp; Assessment: Principles &amp; Procedures</td>
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